

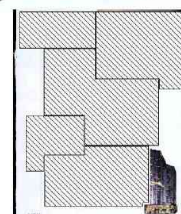
travelista

Frequent flyer Claire Wrathall **fast-tracks international intelligence on where to be and what to see.**

FIFA made the draw for next year's World Cup finals yesterday, and so there is no time to lose in making arrangements if you want to travel to South Africa next summer. Whether you're looking for a luxurious private mansion with staff and armed security within striking distance of **SOWETO**,

where five first-round matches including the opener and the final will be played, or an elegant beach-front house in **CAPE TOWN**'s vibrant Camps Bay, not far from its new glow-in-the-dark Green Point Stadium, the person to consult is the formidably well-connected Frances Geoghegan of Africa Travel (www.africatransel.co.uk). She has the low-down on not just the desirable private rentals, but also the soon-to-open hotels, such as the Taj (www.tajhotels.com), part of which has been converted from the former Temple Chambers and South Africa Reserve Bank on St George's Mall in Cape Town.

Among the grandest hotels in the Taj portfolio is the Umaid Bhawan Palace in part of the maharajah's palace in **JODHPUR**. But if grandeur on that scale doesn't appeal, then Raas (www.walledcityhotels.com; book through www.indiaportfolio.co.uk), the city's first boutique hotel, promises an alluring alternative. Founded by Nikhilendra Singh, a professional polo player and co-director of exclusive travel company Natural Mystic South Asia (www.natmystic.com), it's been converted from 19th-century sandstone buildings, along with a modern wing, just below the Meherangarh Fort, to



which 35 of the 39 rooms face.

Chile's pioneering boutique-hotel company Explora has also always made much of the views from its rooms, but then it's tended to favour far-flung settings – Patagonia, Easter Island – set amid sensational scenery. The latest addition to its portfolio is Casa Porta (www.explora.com; doubles from \$120), an independent 19th-century wine estate an hour from **SANTIAGO** that makes a more memorable stopover than a night in a city-centre hotel for those en route to or from, for instance, its **ATACAMA** property in San Pedro. That fine hotel now faces competition from just-opened Casa Atacama (www.casaatacama.com; two nights from \$690). Like its neighbour, it's a development of stylish, sustainably designed rooms run on an all-inclusive basis, with a rate that includes not just meals (the llama paté is optional) and wine, but guided excursions into the desert, including those on horseback.

Riding – this time through **ARIZONA**'s epic landscape – is one of many outdoor activities also on offer at Dove Mountain (www.ritzcarlton.com; doubles from \$329), the latest in Ritz-Carlton's portfolio, which opens on December 18, >>

20 miles northwest of Tucson in the high Sonoran Desert close to the Tortolita mountains; a place from which to hike, mountain bike – even learn to pen cattle and play golf on its Jack Nicklaus-designed course.

For all their Monument Valley splendour, until recently the very limited range of top-rated accommodation on offer in

America's southwestern states tempered their appeal. But now there's an Amanresort, Amangiri (www.amangiri.com; doubles from \$800), in southern **UTAH**, close to Canyon Point and within striking distance of mesmerisingly extraordinary Lake Powell.

Arizona and **Utah** also share a state line with Nevada, and here too there's a major opening this weekend in **LAS VEGAS**, to which British Airways has finally launched a direct route from the UK (www.ba.com). Mandarin Oriental (www.mandarinoriental.com; doubles from \$579) is unveiling a 392-room hotel in a 47-storey tower by skyscraper specialists Kohn Pedersen Fox at the heart of the Strip. With a restaurant, Twist, by Pierre Gagnaire – his first in the US – designed, like the rest of the hotel by Adam Tihany, it promises all the

attributes of a spa resort, though, unusually, there's no casino.

Another Mandarin Oriental, the Jnan Rahma (doubles from £583) in **MARRAKECH**, will be open in spring 2010. Occupying a 53-hectare estate in La Palmeraie, the 150,000 date-palm grove a 20-minute drive north-east of the Medina, it is essentially a resort with an immense spa. But unlike most hotels in this more rural part of town, it also plans to have a *funduk* (Arabic for inn) in the heart of the Medina, somewhere that guests can seek respite from the hustle of the souk. Its chief appeal, however, promises to be its design, a melting pot of Asian styles, Ottoman, Mughal, as well as Moroccan, conceived by the American painter turned architect, Stuart Church, whom the writer William Burroughs called "the

last of the Orientalists" when they knew each other in Tangier.

Also new in Morocco, 90km south of Casablanca on the coast at **EL JADIDA**, Mazagan (www.mazaganbeachresort.com) is Kerzner International's new development of modern villas, a creation of the Moroccan architect Jamal Lamiri Alaoui, with a five-storey hotel at its heart, as well as a casino and a Gary Player links-style golf course.

If, however, it's a winter escape to a white-sand beach you crave, then the Kudat Riviera (www.kudatriviera.com; villas from MYR2,232) in Malaysian **BORNEO** is new villa resort on the island's north coast set amid coconut palms, rice paddies and luxuriant vegetation.

Back in Europe, this weekend sees the start of the **FLORENCE** Biennale (www.florencebiennale.org; till December 13). This year its Lorenzo il Magnifico award has been won by Gilbert & George. If you're in town, then don't miss *Art and Illusions: Masterpieces of Trompe l'Oeil from Antiquity to the Present*, till January 24 at the city's intriguing Palazzo Strozzi (www.palazzostrozzi.org) – it's a fascinating survey of art intended to deceive the eye. ♦



Above: room with a view at Amanresort Amangiri in Utah.



Above: Casa Porta wine estate near Santiago. Right: the new Mandarin Oriental, Las Vegas, designed by Kohn Pedersen Fox.

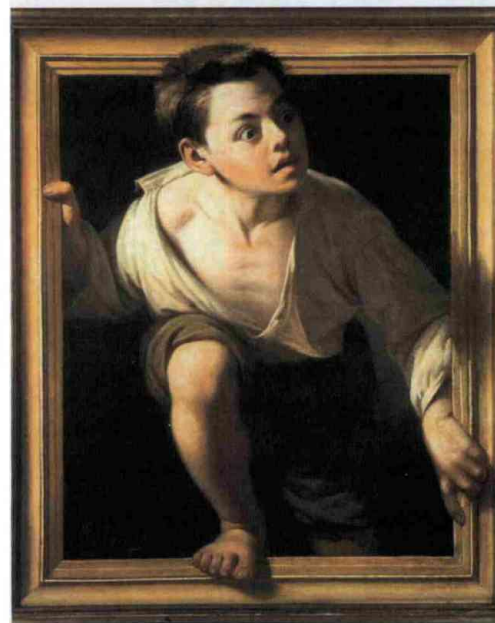




Above: the Mandarin Oriental Jnan Rahma in Marrakech, with the Atlas Mountains behind.



Above: fine dining inside the Taj Cape Town. Right: *Escaping Criticism* by Pere Borrell Del Caso, from *Art and Illusions* exhibition at the Palazzo Strozzi in Florence.



COLLECTION OF THE BANK OF SPAIN.